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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 12, 1941

SUBJECT: "THE THANKSGIVING TURKEY." Information from marketing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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It's time to talk turkey--about how to select the turkey for your Thanksgiving dinner, and about how much you can expect to pay for it. Here's turkey news direct from the marketing men of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

First, here's news about the turkey crop this year. Turkeys are making another record this year--33 million 553 thousand turkeys is the figure the marketing men give. And more turkeys this year are of the heavy, broad-breasted kind.

The government is buying several thousand of these big birds for Thanksgiving dinner for our men in uniform.

And hotels and restaurants will use a lot more of these big birds. Turkey nowadays appears regularly on menus of hotels and restaurants the year around rather than just at holiday time. But there'll be plenty of turkey left--especially plenty of the smaller turkeys the right size for most families nowadays--and for our small home ovens and small roasting pans.

As for the price of turkey this year, it will be considerably higher than last year, marketing men predict. But even at that turkey prices haven't gone up as much as prices of other meats.

Now about choosing a turkey at the market. The easiest way to get the quality you want in turkey is to buy a Government-graded turkey. All turkeys that show a Government grade, either by a label fastened to the wing, or by a statement stamped on the shipping box, were graded by men who know turkeys and

are authorized by the U. S. Department of Agriculture to do the grading.

Government grades on turkeys are especially helpful, for, in the first place, you probably don't buy a turkey very often, so have little chance to learn to judge quality for yourself. Then, too, a turkey usually is a fairly expensive buy in food and you want to get your money's worth.

True, all stores don't carry government graded turkeys, but lots more have them this year than other years. Still more will have them next year, if you homemakers ask for them now. If you want government graded turkeys, tell your storekeeper.

This year most of the Government-graded turkeys in the stores will be U. S. Primes or U. S. Grade A. The very top grade is U. S. Special, but turkeys must be so perfect to get this grade that few can measure up. But a U. S. Grade A or Prime turkey is always a fine bird. It's always well-fleshed -- that means there's plenty of meat per pound of turkey. And it will have a straight breast bone, no torn skin, no bruises, and very few pin feathers. The cardboard tag fastened in the turkey's wing will tell you if the turkey was Government graded and what the grade is. The tag gives the quality grade -- such as U. S. Grade Prime -- and also the age class of the turkey. For example, the tag may read, "U. S. Prime Turkey--Young" in blue letters. The color isn't the same on all tags. They are often lettered in blue for U. S. Prime, and in red for U. S. Choice.

U. S. Choice or U. S. Grade B is the other grade you'll find frequently on turkeys in your local stores. U. S. Choice turkeys are fairly well-fleshed and fairly well-fatted. They aren't quite so high quality as the U. S. Primes. The meat may not be quite so juicy. There may be a few more tears in the skin, or a few bruises, or a few pin feathers scattered over the turkey. But even though not so high in quality as U. S. Prime, U. S. Choice is good meat.

Incidentally about those pin feathers -- if there are some -- an easy way to get them out is to use a pair of tweezers. Then you're not so apt to tear the skin as if you try to scrape them out. Tweezing is the way some of the experts get turkeys ready for those elegant looking dinners you see pictured in the current magazines. Torn skin gets darker than the other skin as it cooks, and then the turkey dinner doesn't look quite so good. That's one reason why turkeys with any torn skin can't receive one of the top two U. S. Grades -- that is, U. S. Special or U. S. Prime. Turkey graders consider appearance and ease of preparation as well as eating quality.

The last U. S. quality grade for turkey is U. S. Commercial or U. S. Grade C. You won't find any turkeys marked with this grade in the retail stores -- that is, not by the wing label. This grade may be marked on the shipping box, however. U. S. Grade C turkeys aren't of as high quality as U. S. Choice -- but don't misunderstand me -- they're plenty good enough to eat. But they won't be so good <u>looking</u>, nor will they have as much flesh on their bones. For their weight, there'll be less turkey to eat. They may have more pin feathers, the breast bone may be crooked, and they may be harder to prepare and serve. On the other hand, they are cheaper per pound than turkeys of higher grade. Well, there's the story of turkey grades and it's up to you to make your choice.

These same grade standards hold whether the turkeys are of the big, broad-breasted type or the new small breeds that the U. S. Department of Agriculture and some of the State experiment stations have developed especially for small families. These new breeds are small even when fully mature. This makes lots more turkeys for small families.

What if you haven't Government labels to guide you in buying? Well, take a tip from these Government graders and look for a bird that is plump, well-fleshed, without bruises, torn skin, deformed bone, or too many pin feathers.

And that's the turkey talk for today.

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